

Grievances, agency and the absence of conflict: The new Suzano pulp investment in the Eastern Amazon

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Highlights

- First study focusing on theorizing the absence of conflict and its causes.
- A systematic analysis of Latin American projects illuminates why conflicts escalate.
- Provides a novel typology to differentiate the role of grievances in conflicts.
- Local political-cultural dynamics explain conflict better than other factors.
- Conflict existence depends on the quality of industry-activist-state actor relations.

Abstract

In November 2013, Suzano Papel e Celulose, a Brazilian paper company, is projected to inaugurate the world's largest pulp mill in Imperatriz in the remote state of Maranhão, Eastern Amazon. This investment will further consolidate Brazil's position as the leading exporter of wood-pulp coming from vast, corporate-controlled industrial plantations. These inland forestry investments are a feature of the second wave of large pulp projects, extending inland from the best lands in the coastal belt via accessible rivers and railroad networks. This globally significant inland expansion has been poorly studied, if at all. No publications exist on this Suzano pulp project. Empirically, this article provides a baseline study on the political economic dynamics.

The case is highly relevant for conflict theory. Generally, industrial tree plantation expansion has boosted grievances, but the resistance and conflicts have varied depending on the social actors' agency. In comparison to the high-intensity conflicts between the rural social movements such as the Brazilian Landless Movement (MST) and the pulp companies in most other new investments, there has been a rare absence of conflict in this

case, as no movement has seized on local grievances. Conflicts cannot be studied in-depth by focusing only on conflict cases. Absence-cases open up an opportunity to revisit the question why conflicts arise. An analysis of this case allows an empirically rooted theoretical discussion on conflict causalities, which can answer several vexing questions in the study of conflicts. A new and generally applicable typology of different types of grievances is offered, and the grievances' causal relation to conflicts is examined. The importance of political dynamics and inter-personal relations in investment conflicts is emphasized. The way culture influences conflict dynamics is pondered upon by ethnography of the Brazilian conflict culture, where personal relations are more relevant in explaining conflict escalation than in the political systems with a stronger (impersonal) rule of law. The role of third parties such as other industries in the investment area is discussed. A qualitative comparative analysis of the major pulp project conflicts and their causes in Latin America is offered. Mobilization and thus conflict causality is explainable only when taking into account the types of grievances and the local, inter-personal, and organizational (state–business–movement) relations by which these are remediated and negotiated.

Keywords

- Natural resource conflicts;
- Paper and pulp industry;
- Industrial tree plantations;
- Social movements;
- Brazil;
- Latin America

1. Introduction

1.1. Conflicts over pulpwood plantation lands and conflict causalities

The increased demand for commodities including timber has caused growing socio-environmental pressure across the globe ([Borras et al., 2011](#)). An illustrative example of this dynamic is the march of new large-scale pulp projects deeper into Latin America (e.g. Brazilian inlands, Uruguayan pampas, and Chilean cordilleras). As a consequence of pulp expansion, traditional rural and ecological mosaics have been converted into sources of transnational, single commodity extraction. In many Latin American pulp projects, community activists have seized on local grievances fuelled by already incurred or expected socio-environmental damages, creating conflicts ([Kröger, 2011](#), [Kröger, 2012](#) and [Kröger, in press](#)). Yet this has not happened everywhere.

Endowments, the investment area's geographic position or grievances are not sufficient conditions to explain conflict, as there are numerous cases across the world, also in global peripheries, with extreme damage levels and high grievances that do not have conflicts (such as the one studied here).¹ To make causal claims on what creates conflicts requires the study of social relations in particular political–cultural contexts, including

comparisons to non-conflict cases. The striking absence of conflict in Suzano's new pulp investment in Brazil's Western Maranhão offers a possibility for re-examining the reasons for the variance in conflicts (or their absence). To look deep into conflict, one must look even deeper into non-conflict situations.

The article is of considerable interest in the context of increasing contestations and conflicts in various parts of the world between local communities, corporate actors and the state over the control and management of natural resources ([White et al., 2012](#)). The general reasons for state/industry–local community conflicts have been widely discussed, particularly within political economy and ecology ([Peluso and Watts, 2001](#), [Martinez-Alier, 2002](#) and [Peet et al., 2010](#)). However, conflict absence has not been studied. A Scopus search (5 February 2013) for publications mentioning “absence of conflict” with “land” or “forest” found no results; a search for “absence of conflict” and “resource” resulted in six articles, none of which engaged in studying the dilemma of conflict absence.

Previous studies on tree plantation conflicts have mapped the correlations between grievances and conflict (e.g. [Gerber, 2010](#)), but much more study is needed on the causal chain leading to mobilization and conflict escalation.² The causal chain from grievance to protest is not automatic, but embedded in socio-political relations. These must be pruned to be able to show causality. This argument, developed in the article, can add more depth to the explanation of all kinds of conflicts.

Research material was collected through fieldwork in Latin America between 2004 and 2011 in most of the new pulp investment areas (see [Kröger, 2011](#), [Kröger, 2012](#) and [Kröger, in press](#) for details about data and methods). Ethnography and participant observation in the Eastern Amazon regarding the new Suzano project was conducted in early 2011, with 35 semi-structured interviews of key actors in Portuguese (ranging in length from 1 h to long sessions on several days, average length 2.5 h), including representatives of local communities, movements, intellectuals, state actors, and company directors.³ A case study approach was adopted, using the snowball sampling method and triangulation.⁴ A systematic qualitative comparative analysis (see [Ragin, 1987](#) and [Kröger, 2011](#) for methodological discussion) of this case data to that collected on other pulp conflicts in Latin America (in [Kröger, 2011](#), [Kröger, 2012](#), [Kröger, in press](#), [Kröger and Nylund, 2012](#) and [Nylund and Kröger, 2012](#)) guided the theory foundation and analysis.

1.2. Objective

Understanding the ever-more urgent phenomenon of industrial forestry conflicts (or their absence) requires analysis of the political processes whereby land use is determined. Earlier research has shown that local investment-level dynamics have to be pruned in order to understand how outcomes are defined: global or national-levels, where the initial decisions are made, do not determine the subsequent trajectory ([Hall, 2002](#), [Kröger, 2011](#) and [Kröger, in press](#)).

The surprising absence of conflict related to eucalyptus plantation expansion, exposed while interviewing Suzano stakeholders one by one, suggested that what was theoretically interesting in this case was to study 1) why there were no major conflicts, and 2) how they had thus far been avoided. All possible alternative explanations had to be assessed. This included the analysis of grievances, cultural context, and the dynamics around previous land-use projects in the socio-political context where the investment was located. To explain the role of particular actors and their doings in relation to others required analyzing if there was active agency

on the part of some individual to prevent conflicts from arising, agency with substantial capacity to influence these dynamics.

I will first discuss the causal relationships between grievances and mobilization, and then the role of movement–state–industry dynamics in conflicts. Next, a regional development history sheds light on the different kinds of grievances Big Pulp in Imperatriz region has boosted, and which not. The role of inter-personal relations and the cultural context are then analyzed to explain more in-depth the surprisingly non-conflictive character of the project's agrarian relations. The concluding sections summarize the findings.

1.3. Theory

1.3.1. Forestry conflicts, agency, culture and power relations

What is a conflict? It is useful to distinguish conflicts by their intensity, both for methodological and conflict resolution purposes. A recent large study attempting to compare global mining conflicts for example divides these into three levels: low-level conflicts (some local organizing); medium (street protests or other visible mobilization); high (deaths, violence, or arrests) ([Özkaynak et al., 2012](#)). This categorization is adapted here.

Earlier forest policy research has illustrated conflicts can be visible or invisible ([Hubo and Krott, 2013--this issue](#)). The visibility depends on the recognition and communication of an issue as a conflict, not on the “objective” situation itself ([Hubo and Krott, 2012](#)). Practically anything can be defined as a conflict. In this sense, conflicts exist everywhere all the time, power struggles being omnipresent. If an actor group wishes to and manages to transform an issue into a contentious one, conflict becomes visible. Thus, conflict studies are studies about the use (and non-use) of resistance strategies that shape the policy agenda and process ([Kröger, in press](#)).⁵ A central question arises: why do actor groups decide not to communicate a situation as a conflict? Culture and political economic relations play key roles.

[Hellström \(2001\)](#) has approached forestry conflicts by seeing them as cultural products of a given country. The presupposition taken in this ‘conflict culture’-approach is that every culture has a tendency to produce particular types of conflicts, and an inclination to react into these in a particular manner ([Hellström, 2001](#)). The notion is helpful in examining the role of local culture in conflict causalities. [DaMatta \(1992: 139\)](#), a renowned anthropologist of Brazil, has argued that in Brazil ‘there is a long road to travel between the existence of a crisis and its recognition.’ Conflicts are typically not seen as productive feedback, by which to correct policy, but as ‘omens of the end of the world, as signs of unbearable failure,’ this cultural valuation curbing conflict recognition. So cultural variations in conflict dynamics have to be taken into account.

Power relations within the political economy also influence conflicts. Particularly those defending the dominant economic interests do not typically want conflict visibility: investors and the general public might become wary of the ethical issues and negative impacts. Markets typically react to conflicts strongly, taking these as a sign of uncertainty and risk: large-N studies in the United States have found that protests against a company generally cause a fall in stock value ([Soule, 2009](#)). State actors, on the other hand, are afraid of conflicts shaming their ability and legitimacy to work for public good. However, why do negatively impacted social actors not mobilize always, attempting to make a conflict visible? Several explanations have been given to address this dilemma.

1.3.2. Grievances in pulpwood plantation projects

Grievances have been argued to play a role in social movement mobilization ([McAdam et al., 2001](#)). To be able to test the role of grievances, it is best to disaggregate them to different types. This is done below for the pulpwood plantation expansion, the disaggregation being applicable to other sectors. First, there is a set of 'specific grievances' typically arising against corporate pulpwood plantations: pollution of soil and waters in the investment area; expansion to traditional communities' lands; rural mechanization and ensuing unemployment; industrial pollution; increased traffic due to logistical operations; outsourcing and the degradation of working conditions; creation of food insecurity by monocultures and land concentration in areas of intense rural exodus, lacking agrarian reform, public policies, and without titling of traditional territories ([Carrere, 2009](#) and [Gerber, 2010](#)). A universally applied investment model, such as the large-scale pulp model, tends to create a set of broadly similar industry-specific grievances across different contexts. Second, there are 'relative grievances,' which set the specific grievances in a contextual and historical setting. Local people judge new projects based on past experiences, evaluating methods of insertion and potential benefits and losses in land use change based on what is considered a just way of distributing land access in the local 'moral economy' (see [Wolford, 2010](#)). Third, there are also the more 'objectively observable grievances' such as state capacity and the ecological suitability of a region to receive a massive investment: if the investment surpasses the objective limits, grievances are likely to arise. Maranhão's state infrastructure for receiving a massive investment, with massive impacts of the size of the Suzano pulp project, is arguably the least developed in the context of Brazilian pulp expansion: it is the poorest state, with least capacities to take care of potential problems such as rural exodus ([Nascimento and Moraes, 2009](#) and [Puppim de Oliveira, 2008](#)).

Grievances are typically framed by activists. Using pre-existing categorizations to address complex local problems related to abrupt changes, framings never completely describe the phenomena in play ([Snow and Benford, 1992](#)), but allow politicization via a discursively transmissible conceptualization of eucalyptus, for example, as 'producing hunger' ([Kröger, 2011](#)). Another issue is how framing/grievances lead to mobilization.

1.3.3. Grievances do not explain mobilization

The movement literature offers various explanations for mobilization ([McAdam et al., 2001](#) and [Wolford, 2010](#)). For example, the 'political opportunity structure' theorists, still powerful in social movement studies, argue that the leeway in the political system to mount a movement is the most important explainer of mobilization (e.g. [Tarrow, 2011](#)). This strand argues that the building of enduring movements, and the attainment of goals via conflicts, is easier in liberal political systems where mobilizations receive media attention and are not repressed. In another theoretical vein, the Marxist treatments of mobilization normally emphasize that movements arise in consequence of economic hardship, where actors have objective grievances that are too much to bear (as examples, see [Polanyi, 2001](#) and [Silver, 2003](#)). In the Marxist sense, Big Pulp would be the driving agrarian change phenomenon, an objective grievance, and ensuing conflicts merely the (almost) unavoidable symptoms of this economic process. Still others emphasize the role of agency, framing and ideology ([Snow and Benford, 1992](#)). In general, there is variation within different theoretical schools between those seeing mobilization as dialectically and almost automatically following the accumulation of grievances (when people just cannot stand injustice anymore), and those emphasizing agency and internal movement organizations ([McAdam et al., 2001](#) and [Tarrow, 2011](#)).

A systematic comparison of conflicts (and their absence) in all the major pulp investments in Latin America suggests that grievances, political opportunities or framings alone or in conjunction do not automatically or even mostly explain mobilization ([Kröger, in press](#)). What was more important was to engage in multiple state-remediated political games using both contentious and routine political strategies, all of which turned passive people into active contesters and demanders of citizen rights. Political games through which investment politics are remediated can be divided into two main categories: state-remediated and private politics ([Soule, 2009](#) and [Kröger, in press](#)). Private politics includes corporate social responsibility (CSR) and other direct stakeholder dialog attempts that seek investment governance by companies without government intervention. The role of private and state-remediated politics in the Suzano investment will be discussed, and compared to other cases, to decree whether CSR and other forms of private politics may decrease mobilization and conflicts.

2. Background

2.1. Historical explanations: development and grievances on the pioneer frontier

The state of Maranhão, and the Eastern Amazon in general, have a history of predatory logging, violence, and continuing social injustice ([May, 1990](#) and [Puppim de Oliveira, 2008](#)), such as debt slavery. This region has been subjected to large-scale investment projects of resource exploitation of national and global importance since the 1970s, principally via the huge Projeto Grande Carajás (PGC) ([Santos, 2011](#)). PGC, a key project of the military regime, inserted the Eastern Amazon, socio-culturally, environmentally, and economically, into the circles of national and global capitalism ([Nascimento and Moraes, 2009](#)). Huge mines, infrastructure, metal industries, charcoal furnaces, logging operations, pasturelands, industrial forestry, and other developmentalist projects were implanted ([Franklin, 2008: 186](#)). Former forestlands including virgin forests and agroforestry smallholdings, most of which were state lands, were turned into inefficiently managed pastures, now claimed by descendants of large-scale land-grabbers ([Asselin, 2009](#)). Peasant populations that were expelled or bought out have increasingly contested land use and ownership rights since the 1980s ([Puppim de Oliveira, 2008](#)). Rural conflicts are ubiquitous, the number of families displaced in these (13,701 families in 2010) being clearly the highest of all the nine Brazilian states that have large pulpwood plantations ([Kröger, 2012: 958](#)). This brew of messy land rights, rising mobilization, and compounded injustices has generated an investment context that can easily become combustible. Yet, the land prices are among the lowest in Brazil: in 2006, the average pastureland price in Maranhão was 184 reais, by far the lowest across all nine pulpwood expansion states (*ibid*), offering a strong incentive to invest. Eucalyptus, soybean and other plantation expansion has been rampant in the past five years, often characterized by high-intensity conflicts.

2.2. The better of two evils: from charcoal to pulpwood eucalyptus

Eucalyptus and pine plantations were established in the Amazon beginning in the early 1970s by the Médici government, to implant pulp mills in the future, but in the mid-1980s these plantations were turned over to charcoal production ([Santos, 2011](#)). Smoky charcoal furnaces in the region regularly use debt slavery to force workers into subhuman working conditions, resulting in severe damage to health and deprivation of basic human rights (interviews with public prosecutor Felício Pontes, Belém, 1 March 2011; Milton Teixeira from the Center for Defense of Life and Human Rights (CDVDH), and Padre Antonio from the Combonian Missionaries/Justice on the Rails, Açailândia, 17 March 2011). In this setting of negatively perceived charcoal dominance, the population of the Imperatriz region greeted the news of a pulp investment by Celmar SA

Industria de Celulose e Papel in 1992 as a chance to develop an alternative to the charcoal industry (interviews with local movement leaders, March 2011).

Nevertheless, rural movements (including trade unions and landless movements) resisted Celmar, fearing corporate land concentration and environmental havoc. Celmar, which initially bought about 30,000 ha of lands in the region, with extensive accompanying rural exodus, never finished a pulp project, but in 2003 turned into a charcoal operation called Ferro Gusa Carajás ([Santos, 2011: 190](#)). This created great disappointment in the general local population, which felt betrayed as they had believed they would receive jobs and development, not more charcoal-production related pollution and problems. Celmar bought all types of territories and used 'the most varied forms of pressure' to create extensive continuous eucalyptus plantations, without being obliged by environmental authorities to obtain the legally required licenses ([Franklin, 2008: 192](#)).

Enter Suzano. Vale, a Brazilian iron-ore company which owned most of Celmar, started the final downsizing of all its (nominally) pulp and paper sector shares in 2001 ([Franklin, 2008: 193](#)), continuing to operate the Ferro Gusa Carajás plantations (about 34,000 ha), and using them for its charcoal furnaces. Now Vale has sold also these plantations to Suzano, while also selling eucalyptus to Suzano from its plantations in the Pará state. Besides this, according to a company director, Suzano acquired about 50,000 ha of native forests from Vale's ex-Celmar project (interview with Adriana Carvalho, responsible director of Suzano's Northern environmental and social impacts, Imperatriz, 18 March 2011).

After the Celmar episode, which the local population reported seeing as a deceitful and deliberate way to sell a charcoal project to the region, using pulp investment as a Trojan horse while nevertheless bringing in the undesired eucalyptus plantations, Suzano's arrival was greeted with suspicion by all. Despite a call to arms against Suzano's Maranhão and Piauí projects by Latin American anti-eucalyptus monoculture activists ([Barros, 2008](#) and [Carrere, 2009](#)), however, the resistance in Imperatriz region did not visibly mobilize against or influence the environmental impact assessment that concluded in licensing pulp mill construction in November 2010 (see [SEMA, 2010](#)). Mill construction started in early 2011.⁶ The other eucalyptus expansion projects, focusing on energywood in Maranhão and pulp in Piauí, were strongly resisted by rural movements, and discontinued.

This was not the way it had to go in Imperatriz: proactive state actors, landless movement activists and their allies in the Southern Rio Grande do Sul state resisted the implantation of three massive pulp ventures in 2005–2008 and managed to discontinue these projects ([Kröger, 2011](#)). That resistance was highly organized to visibly protest and bar the conversion of potential land reform areas into eucalyptus plantations. In Maranhão, by contrast, quite a few activists saw the turning of existing eucalyptus plantations from charcoal into pulp production as a relative improvement, even if they criticized the structural change in land access. There had been no visible pulp plantation-conflicts as of February 2013.⁷

The absence of rural conflict is odd, considering the high objective and investment-specific grievances. For Adalberto Franklin (Interview, Imperatriz, March 2011), a local intellectual and publisher, Suzano was causing 'massive rural exodus' which he has seen is 'filling the city's slums,' and the company was also 'occupying and claiming ownership on communally or customarily held lands of squatters that would have a right to these

lands by law via their existing use of the land for production.' Several land ownership lawsuits have already entered the justice system, public prosecutors helping the displaced people.

3. How conflicts have been avoided thus far: stakeholder views on Suzano impacts

3.1. State–industry relations

At Incra (the National Institute for Colonization and Agrarian Reform) in Imperatriz, the directors were quite concerned about Suzano. José Duarte, Incra's agronomist in the region since the 1970s (interview, 14 March 2011), said Suzano had "bought the most fertile and best situated land areas all around, which could have been given over for food production." He suggested that "the government should earmark areas for the production of food" and that "zoning must be done" to make the expansion sounder. Incra officials lamented they do not have the resources of corporations to buy land for the landless. For the superintendent, José Redondo (Interview 16 March 2011) the land problem is serious, "as no one is interested in selling lands to Incra" and because Incra is weak in impacting the local land use policy (which is steered much more by the rural movements in Redondo's view). According to the superintendent, Suzano is taking over large land areas.

In another central institution with lawful possibilities to steer land investment pace and style, the federal environmental office Ibama (the Brazilian Institute of Environment and Renewable Natural Resources; which the regional socio-environmental director of Suzano, Adriana Carvalho, headed before joining the company), and its current director Orlan Ascensão (interview, Imperatriz, 16 March 2011), said that eucalyptus planting for charcoal and pulp is 'reforestation,' in line with Suzano framing. Ascensão also said that 'we are not paying much attention to the environmental impacts [of Suzano], as these are explained in their Environmental Impact Assessment [done by Pöyry, a Finnish consulting company, prior to the investment, based on company estimates, and approved by executive powers largely favoring investment].'

Opinions of politicians varied, most being pro-Suzano. [Carlos Brandão \(no date\)](#), a federal parliamentarian of the PSDB party, who was involved in both pulp projects (Celmar and Suzano) together with his party-fellow Sebastião Madeira, the mayor of Imperatriz, praised the project, saying such development should be 'celebrated and embraced.' Even though the project came 'late,' it was 'finally here!' The vice-mayor of Açailândia, Antonio Erismar (PT), is worried about the investment: 'traditional areas of rice and beans, food plantations, have today been taken over by eucalyptus' ([Dantas, 2011](#)). In most local accounts, the state government was framed as having been in the clutches of the conservative family of José Sarney (PMDB) for over 40 years, and strongly embedded in corporate agency. The current governor, Sarney's daughter, has strongly supported the investment.

When asked if the government or state were listening to their grievances, Eli Kerobina from the rural trade union STTR said that 'the Sarney family governing Maranhão gives everything to the pulp companies, licensing included. When a Sarney was not elected governor (2005–2008), and the PDT party not favorable to pulp projects came into power, then [eucalyptus] expansion stopped, but after the Sarney family returned, the expansion started again.'⁸

The public prosecutors have filed suits, as the company has not acquired the legally required plantation permits from the environmental authorities. Meanwhile, the expansion has continued, the company arguing

that the licensing by state-level executive powers it has received is sufficient. These accounts reveal that the state institutions are weak (non-autonomous and lacking bureaucratic capacity) and rule of law absent or low, while the executive political power is strong.

3.2. Rural trade unions: 'What leaves us frustrated is that they get all the land'

Local extractive populations' associations, socio-environmental NGOs, and Rural Trade Unions (STTRs) resisted the implementation of Celmar's pulp mill, and had a significant role in impeding the Celmar project according to some movement leaders ([Santos, 2011: 195](#)), even though internal corporate factors (leading to charcoal, not pulp) were more important for some leaders. Why did these not resist Suzano? The answers varied by movements. In contrast to other Brazilian pulp conflicts, the most antagonistic views in interviews were given not by the landless movements, but the landed trade union peasants.

According to Eli Kerobina, a high-ranking member of the rural trade union in Imperatriz, 'all impacts of Suzano have been negative' (Interview, 16 March 2011). To a question on the positive impacts of Suzano and strategies the trade union has used to influence the situation, Kerobina replied that 'Suzano, as Celmar before, offers many social programs, but in reality just wants to take over land'; the government has not listened to peasant grievances. Yet Kerobina also said they are able to sit at the table with Suzano to present and discuss project proposals:

If they would offer projects to family agriculture things could be different. We have many proposals. But what leaves us frustrated is that they get all the land. Of course many want to offer their lands to Suzano, even from our association. Normally those who sell are large-scale farmers. We have not yet managed to slow down the expansion of Suzano. We have not occupied eucalyptus plantations as they have many guards and we would need machines [to cut eucalyptus]. But we have a campaign, and would like the company to cease from existing, or to do things differently, without expelling us, but returning the land to the state and farmers.

The existence of a campaign but the lack of any visible protest suggests that the Suzano relations with rural unions were in a low-level conflict, which could nevertheless be remediated by direct dialog in the view of the unionist. All the other rural movements (MST, traditional extractivist populations, indigenous, afro-Brazilian communities, and others) were in an absence of conflict with Suzano.

State absence and direct negotiation suggests that Suzano–rural trade union relations were characterized by private politics, and possibly also by fear and lack of serious protesting capacity. Similar private politics were present also in the MST–Suzano relations: this is very interesting as the MST has a much stronger protesting capacity than any other movement in Brazil and Maranhão ([Kröger, 2011](#)).

3.3. MST relations: 'Suzano was different, but we know it is not different'

José Luis da Silva Costa, from the MST (Interview, coordinator of the California settlement, Açailândia, 13 March 2011), had a friendlier attitude towards Suzano. MST had attained large settlements for their landless members in the region in the past, which might partly explain the difference with trade union-linked farmers feeling the pressure of eucalyptus advance on their irregularly or conventionally registered small plots. However, there are also other reasons. José Luis lives and is active in a 7000 ha agrarian reform settlement of 15 years containing 183 families next to the charcoal plant and eucalyptus plantations of Vale that Suzano

bought. Since March 2010, Suzano has been visiting the settlement, 'attempting to win people to its side, to co-opt them, offering courses, jobs, a library, equipment.' Relations are cordial and even friendly. For José Luis, Suzano wants to be the friend of the settlement in the middle of their eucalyptus lands, and can even help in 'getting government money and using it for our benefit.' Importantly, 'they promised that the charcoal furnaces would be closed after this cycle of eucalyptus. For Vale, our presence did not matter much when they installed the furnaces in 2004 next to us. They did not communicate with us. Suzano was different, but we know it is not different. They gave us instructions on how and equipment to put out fires in the eucalyptus woods, and assured us we would not have the health problems we had with Vale's use of herbicides next to us.'

In the MST discourse, the discussion of Suzano as 'different' illustrates a primarily private politics-type relation. 'But we know it is not different,' on the other hand, illustrates how deep differences in interests and ideological-political objectives are not necessarily translated into conflicts.

The absence of conflict escalation can be explained by a variety of factors. First, there was a shared interest between the potential protester (MST) and its target (Suzano), and a significant third party (Vale). The role of third parties has often been neglected in conflict and movement studies, yet should be carefully studied as it often plays a very important role in explaining outcomes ([Luders, 2010](#)). Since routine legal/political means used against Vale had not brought results, the MST settlers started regular protests against the pollution caused by the furnaces. Divina Lopes (several interviews, Açailândia, March 2011), the leader of MST in Maranhão, discussed the struggles in detail. After Celmar turned to charcoal, MST thought that Celmar and Vale had betrayed the population. This is why the MST started a series of anti-Vale occupation protests, the first in the April of 2004. On 8 March 2008, about 500 women forcibly entered Vale's charcoal furnace area next to the California settlement, attempting to destroy machinery and cause economic losses, cutting eucalyptus, and blocking the federal highway running in front. Vale's sale of the charcoal eucalyptus plantation to Suzano was a win-win situation for all these parties, including the important settlement, even though the preferred land use policy of the movement would be family agriculture. Suzano got the plantations and earned MST-trust. Vale got several profitable business deals with Suzano and got rid of a conflict. Suzano's promise to shut down the polluting charcoal furnaces pleased the MST California settlement. It resolved a deep grievance they had had.

Furthermore, the anti-charcoal acts demonstrated the disruptive potential of the MST in the area. The message of such protest acts showing movement strength in general is that the movement is to be taken seriously ([Tilly, 1994](#)). Such history of protesting against Vale, a company that is far more powerful than Suzano, suggests that also the Suzano project could have been discontinued if efforts were made.⁹ In this sense, it was wise for Suzano to approach MST 'differently,' particularly considering that in its eucalyptus-monoculture reliance it was not 'different' in the ideological and structural, land access-sense for the movements. However, the MST also felt that it had not been 'betrayed' in the same way by Suzano as by Vale, this emotional stance potentially impacting the lack of protesting more than the calculation of capabilities.

3.4. Suzano's rural CSR policy in Imperatriz

Another conflict delimiting factor was good inter-personal relations. Suzano's Adriana Carvalho (Interview, Imperatriz, 18 March 2011), argued the company acts differently, by 'establishing good practices with

communities. ... California [MST settlement] is an example of this.' Suzano's 'different' rural CSR practices help to explain the absence of rural conflict: in comparison to other pulp projects, there was no conflict, and much more dialog in Imperatriz. Contextually, Suzano's approach was different in Imperatriz than in the Extreme South of Bahia, where Suzano has a big pulp mill in Mucuri. Interviews with the Bahian MST leaders (Porto Seguro, 1–15 April 2011) revealed that of the three pulp companies operating in the area (Veracel, Fibria and Suzano), Suzano had given the least to the movements, and was the most antagonistic in the movement's eyes. This highlights that project and region-based differences are more significant than company-specific lines. Management guidelines are applied in a variety of ways in different contexts, and the personal trajectories imbued in the local social life of the executing company personnel matter a great deal. This shows how, in the end, conflicts come down to personal relations (or the lack thereof). Carvalho, the director of socio-environmental issues at the Suzano Maranhão/Piauí projects, was considered by environmental authorities, movements and state actors linked to the Workers' Party (PT) in the Imperatriz region as someone who comes from their ranks. This required at least accepting her calls for dialog, and surely influenced the creation of a friendly, even cautionary, tone in company–movement–state institution negotiations.

It is important to note that the delimiting factors overlap and are thus greater than their sum. An analysis of local conflict culture can illustrate how the dynamics between grievances, interests, emotions, capacities and inter-personal relations influence conflict escalation.

4. Explaining the difference: inter-personal relations and local conflict culture

Why no conflict? Firstly, the land use change that the key activists experienced differed from other similar investments, as a significant parcel of the eucalyptus stands were transferred from the existing and highly problematic charcoal industry to the pulp industry, besides the typical conversion of pasture, agricultural and forestland to eucalyptus monocultures (which also occurred). [Buijs and Lawrence \(2013--this issue\)](#) argue changes in land use trigger emotions, which influence information processing and mobilization of protest. In this view, as land use change experienced by the key movement activists was mixed, it could be argued that the causal chain was not ignited.

Yet, in fact, land use change does not automatically trigger emotions. The existing established relations between social actors guide the arising of emotions. The cultural context influences the emotional exchanges. In Brazil, inter-personal relations are much more important than formal rules and relations ([DaMatta, 1992](#)). The locally established (now) Suzano director–local activist friendship explains partly why members of the MST, in deep conflicts with all pulp companies, also with Suzano in Bahia and São Paulo, were not inimical in Imperatriz. To start a conflict here would involve much more difficult emotional transformation than there where existing friendship does not delimit the range of allowed emotions towards a person. To start a conflict would ruin the existing personal relations, inseparable from politics.

Or is the absence of conflict explainable by the project phase? People have been found to dramatically change their opinion on Brazilian pulp projects after two years of operation, when the construction period jobs disappear and the real socio-ecological impacts start to reveal themselves ([Kröger, 2012](#) and [Kröger, in press](#)). However, elsewhere the MST has protested strongly also in situations where the locals have been largely in favor of the pulp project still under construction (e.g. Veracel protest in April 2004) ([Kröger, 2011](#)).

5. Results

[Table 1](#) below summarizes the findings of the qualitative comparative analysis on the conflicts and their explanatory factors in eucalyptus plantation expansion in all the Big Pulp investments in Latin America on which ethnographic or interview data was collected (specific references to data sources can be found in [Kröger, in press](#)).¹⁰ In addition, the energywood plantation projects in Maranhão by Vale and Suzano are included.

Table 1.

Factors explaining eucalyptus plantation expansion-related conflicts in Latin America, 2004–2012.

		Explanatory factors				
Pulp project (state)	Conflict-level (absence, low, medium, high)	Company director–activist friendship?	Investment land-use change perceived by rural population (relative grievances)	Primarily a state-remediated or private politics?	The pulp project the most relevant target for activists in the area?	Significant industry-specific and objective grievances existed?
<i>Brazil</i>						
Suzano (MA)	Absence	Yes	Mixed	Private	No	Yes
Aracruz (ES)	High	No	Negative	State	Yes	Yes
Stora Enso (RS)	High	No	Negative	State	Yes	Yes
Aracruz (RS)	High	No	Negative	State	Yes	Yes
Fibria (BA)	High	No	Negative	State	Yes	Yes
Veracel (BA)	High	No	Negative	State	Yes	Yes
Suzano (BA)	High	No	Negative	State	Yes	Yes
Aracruz (RJ)	Medium	No	Negative	State	Yes	Yes
<i>Other countries</i>						

Explanatory factors

Pulp project (state)	Conflict-level (absence, low, medium, high)	Company director–activist friendship?	Investment land-use change perceived by rural population (relative grievances)	Primarily a state-remediated or private politics?	The pulp project the most relevant target for activists in the area?	Significant industry-specific and objective grievances existed?
CMPC (Peru)	Medium	No	Negative	State	Yes	Yes
CMPC (Chile)	High	No	Negative	State	Yes	Yes
Arauco (Chile)	High	No	Negative	State	Yes	Yes
Botnia/UPM (Uruguay)	Medium	No	Mixed	State	Yes	Yes
Energywood projects (Brazil)						
Suzano (MA)	High	No	Negative	State	Yes	Yes
Vale (MA)	High	No	Negative	State	Yes	Yes

The table reveals most conflicts have been high-intensity. The Suzano Maranhão pulp project is the only one with absence of plantation-based conflict. Three projects had medium-level conflicts. Botnia (in Fray Bentos) had only low-level conflicts in Uruguay where the investment was located, but widespread protesting across the border river with Argentina, where people considered the land use change wholly negative, not mixed as in Uruguay. In Peru, the resistance forced by early protests the parliament to stop CMPC's project in the Amazon in 2008 before it could start. In Rio de Janeiro state, the 2002 Aracruz expansion was stopped by protests and subsequent state-laws. Arrests, violence or deaths were not involved in these cases, but in the others, yes. In no case have the rural populations considered the land use change positive; the case studied here and Botnia were the only ones where relative grievances were mixed. The case at hand differs from all the others also in the sense that the politics between the company and the local movements has not been thus far primarily state-remediated, but relied mostly on direct negotiation, private politics. In all the other cases, the resistance has pressured primarily the state to delimit the negative impacts. Significant objective and industrial forestry-

specific grievances existed in all the cases, this suggesting they were not as important as the other factors observed.

The quality of inter-personal company–movement leader relations, relative grievances, politics (private or state-remediated) and other industries practices in the investment area explain the difference between conflict existence and absence. Conflict-intensity was lower if the expansion was stopped early, before even truly starting (Aracruz in Rio de Janeiro, CMPC in Peru). The Botnia case is an outlier, as it has been an international conflict between Uruguay and Argentina, which has created altogether different dynamics than conflicts within the jurisdiction of one political system. These results apply across industry-lines, as the same causalities were found also in the (wood) energy sector cases studied. However, future studies should integrate also conflict and non-conflict industrial forestry and other industry cases from all other parts of the world to assess the role of the particular conflict culture in Latin America in the causalities presented in [Table 1](#).

6. Conclusions

This research is valuable for general theory-making on when and how land use-based conflicts arise, and when not. The findings are generally very relevant in at least five ways. First, for better or worse, inter-personal friendship between key activists and investment managers tends to create a barrier to conflict escalation. This applies particularly in political and conflict cultures where personal and professional lives have not been separated into a universal rule of law (e.g. Brazil, but also in most other non-Western contexts, [DaMatta, 1992](#)). Second, this applies particularly if the land use change impacts of the investment are not wholly negative, but perceived to be partially positive by and for the key activists.

Third, in weak-state contexts such as Maranhão, corporate agency matters more in explaining conflict existence than in strong state contexts, where the state–movement interaction carries relatively more explanatory power. There was active agency on the part of key Suzano personnel to prevent conflicts from arising, agency with substantial capacity to influence the dynamics in a private politics-setting. Corporate social responsibility comes down to the local interpersonal relations of key managers.

Fourth, the role of third parties has to be also studied, as activists calculate what is the most urgent target of mobilization, and as third parties' clout can be used by both activists and targets to steer investment negotiations. Particularly the presence of companies, whose targeting offers larger publicity for movements, and those framed as creating greater grievances, should be studied.

Fifth, the types of grievances in the investment area should be studied and divided into sub-categories (investment model-specific; relative; and objective). The land-use trajectory in the investment region matters, as grievances are not only objective or specific but also relative. The locals in Western Maranhão pinpointed that Big Pulp was relatively less harmful than charcoal; the absence of relative grievances/framings in the conversion of charcoal eucalyptus plantations into pulp production helped to 'consume' the resistance potential of specific grievances/framings related to pulp. Significant specific and objective grievances, related to rural exodus and filling of slums, for example, existed, yet conflict had not occurred. This implies that relative grievances about negatively perceived land use change are more important than specific or objective ones. Grievances do not automatically explain conflict. The local political–cultural dynamics explain conflict better than the project stage, grievances, geographic location or other explanations.

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Footnotes:

For example, [Özkaynak et al. \(2012\)](#) study on mining conflicts across the world illustrates that although a rough correlation between e.g. water resource damage and conflict exists, similar grievances exist in both low and high-level conflicts, leaving conflict-cause as a puzzle. [Gritten et al. \(2013--this issue\)](#) argue by a quantitative analysis of conflict representation in the internet in English that conflicts would be located mostly in global resource peripheries. This does not reveal conflict causes and does not correspond to actual conflict spread, which should be verified by actual studies. A qualitative comparative analysis based on in-depth field research on actual conflicts and local politics, provided here, can open up the causalities and test the claims of correlation-studies relying on secondary data.

2

Conflicts have been found to correlate foremost with corporate land enclosure leading to displacement (e.g. [Gerber, 2010](#)) and environmental transformations caused to locals by investments (e.g. [Hall, 2002](#)). The case at hand shows that even in the presence of these grievances, agrarian conflict does not necessarily occur or escalate.

3

A social movement consists of 'a sustained challenge to powerholders in the name of a population living under the jurisdiction of those powerholders by means of repeated public displays of that population's numbers, commitment, unity, and worthiness' ([Tilly, 1994: 7](#)).

4

Although a thorough study was done, carefully selecting a representative mix of key actors, it is possible the information retrieved is limited in some aspects; also, most interviews were with movement or institutional leaders, not ordinary people. Some of those interviewed may also have been careful with their wordings, as they knew the results would possibly be published and read by Suzano and others, with whom they had real stakes at play.

5

This research agenda, adopted here, approaches conflicts non-normatively, not attempting to resolve them or making value judgments on their impacts. The more common approach in conflict studies is to recognize conflicts so as to resolve them ([Glasl, 1999](#) and [Druckman, 2005](#)). In forestry, conflict resolution and management are seen as serving the goal of supporting public interests by making policies more balanced, taking into consideration differing interests such as conservation and economic use of forests (e.g. [Hubo and Krott, 2012](#)).

6

Suzano ordered the pulp machinery from the Finnish Metso, which has produced 75% of the world's pulp valve capacity (www.metso.com).

7

The workers constructing the mill have organized several large-scale protests and roadblocks to demand salaries to be paid and better remuneration. The inhabitants along the Estrada de Arroz road leading to the mill site, whose condition has worsened significantly due to the heavy-weight traffic, have organized and protested visibly (see <https://www.facebook.com/FDCEstradadoArroz?ref=ts&fref=ts>, 5 February 2013). The MST, however, has not been involved in these Suzano-related conflicts, but continued direct protests against Vale, blocking the duplication works of the Iron Railroad, to demand Vale to pay the recompensation to locals it promised (<http://www.mst.org.br/node/12866>, 5 February 2013). The railroad is extremely important, carrying the ore from Carajás and future pulp of Suzano to the coast. The railroad, allowing four days faster transport to Europe than by the Southeastern Brazil's coastal pulp ventures, is an important economic explanator for the investment.

8

The centrality of governor change in stopping eucalyptus expansion temporarily suggests that in weak-state context electoral politics can be a more efficient arena to influence investment style than institutional politics.

9

In fact, the other major project of Suzano in Maranhão, expanding 2-year rotation eucalyptus for energywood (pellet) in the Northeastern part of the state, as well as the pulp mill project in Palmeirais in the neighboring state of Piauí, were discontinued by court orders in 2012 after concerted movement-progressive state actor resistance (<http://territorioslivresdobaixoparnaiba.blogspot.fi/2012/07/o-lugar-da-sustentabilidade-nos.html>).

10

Fibria/IP and Eldorado investments in Mato Grosso do Sul, Cenibra in Minas Gerais, and some older investments in São Paulo were not included as I did not have primary data for them. Also the Stora Enso/Arauco project, Montes del Plata, in Uruguay, was left out for this reason. Otherwise, the table is comprehensive. Aracruz is now part of Fibria, 'Aracruz' referring to pre-2009 conflicts in the table.